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Developing effective partnerships for facilitating sustainable tourism associated with protected areas

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Abstract

This paper provides highlights of the progress to date of a two-year Australia-wide study that seeks to identify the attributes, both process and outcome-related, characterizing successful tourism-protected area partnerships. A wide range of literature is used to develop a list of partner-, process- and context-related factors that contribute to successful partnerships. Utilizing this theory-driven approach to analyse the Australian Alps National Parks trans-border partnership, the paper provides preliminary explanations of how and why this particular partnership, in spite of very limited funding, has been successful in achieving desired outcomes. Notably, the partnership has strengthened agency efficiency, helped build organizational, community and tourism industry capacity, enhanced social capital and goodwill, and stimulated innovation. Economic, social, cultural, and ecological sustainability outcomes have been achieved, overcoming legislative and administrative impediments, insufficient resources, and lack of legal authority to implement the activities of the partnership.

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Introduction

In Australia, as is the case elsewhere in the world, there is a call for change in the way protected areas are managed. Constrained by limited resources and driven by legal, ethical and moral imperatives, more and more protected area management (PAM) agencies are engaging with partners to achieve their goals, and nowhere is this more apparent than in their efforts to fulfil the tourism services side of their dual protection/use mandate. While protected areas are clearly essential for a viable and sustainable tourism industry, tourism in turn offers an important vehicle for garnering and maintaining public support for protected areas. Eagles (2002, 139) notes that “generally the trend is for government to demand that parks earn much higher amounts of their budget from tourism sources.” Thus, tourism and protected partnerships are increasingly viewed as a valuable tool for both park management and the tourism industry. There is increasing evidence that working in partnership can lead to “more constructive and less adversarial attitudes” (De Lacy et al. 2002, 10).

Paralleling this move toward more innovative forms of management, as Timothy (1999, 182) points out, there has been a growth in the numbers of parks that straddle or are located adjacent to political borders. Trans-border parks offer additional challenges and opportunities for balancing the dual protection/use mandate that underpins most protected area management. Tourism, like nature, does not stop at jurisdictional borders – as with native animals, water and other resources, tourists often have little or no interest in the boundary lines that determine legislative authority. Trans-border partnerships seem to offer a logical and efficient approach to developing and managing these shared resources for the benefit of both resource protection and tourism.

This paper draws on the work of a two-year Australia-wide research project which is seeking to identify the attributes of successful tourism and protected area partnerships and the factors that contribute to and inhibit partnership success. While much has been written on partnerships in the context of protected areas and tourism management, most studies have used a descriptive case study approach focusing exclusively on examples of successful partnerships rather than considering factors that result in effective vs. failed partnerships. Moreover, they tend to fall short of synthesizing the literature and extracting theoretical constructs that can inform both study design and the analysis of results and thus provide valuable lessons for partnerships elsewhere. The present study examines past tourism-protected area partnership research against a backdrop of a wider literature, in order to strengthen further theorizing and empirical research in this area.

The paper begins by defining some key terms used in our study, and then draws on theory from several bodies of literature to identify a number of partner-, process- and context-related factors that potentially contribute to partnership success. This is followed by an overview of the Australian Alps National Parks (AANP) as a trans-border partnership. Indicators (both process and outcomes) of success are then used to analyse the tourism elements of this partnership, followed by identification of some key factors that may explain this success. This analysis serves to illustrate the relevance of the theory, methods and findings of this study to existing trans-border partnerships and as a basis for recommendations for establishing, assisting and monitoring trans-border partnerships.

Defining partnerships, success, and sustainable tourism

Partnerships

As a starting point, it is useful to define the term *partnership* and examine the explicit differences between it and related terms such as *collaboration*, *cooperation* and *joint management*, which appear to have been used interchangeably in some of the literature (Hall, 1999, Dowling, Powell and Glendinning, 2004, Miller and Ahmad, 2000, Selin, 2004). For

example, Bramwell and Lane (2000, 2-3) observe that “collaboration is commonly used in the academic tourism literature,” while “in government and practitioner circles the term partnerships is widely used ... to denote a collaborative arrangement.”

A useful approach in defining partnerships is to identify the key elements of a partnership. For example, Brinkerhoff (2002) advocates the need for mutuality (mutual dependence, influence, accountability and transparency), and Leach and Pelkey (2001) and others note that while the degree of formality can vary, duration is important. In the context of natural resource management, Selin and Cahavez (1995) argue that partnerships exist in order to solve a problem or an issue that cannot be solved individually, and Bramwell and Lane (2000) stress the need for agreement on rules or norms. For the purposes of this study, partnerships are defined as:

Regular, cross-sectoral interactions over an extended period of time between parties, based on at least some agreed rules or norms, intended to address a common issue or to achieve a specific policy goal or goals, which cannot be solved by the partners individually, and involving pooling and sharing of appreciations or resources, mutual influence, accountability, commitment, participation, trust, respect and transparency. (Laing et al. 2007, 4).

In considering Timothy's (1999) continuum of “cross-border partnerships” that ranges from alienation, to coexistence, to cooperation, to collaboration and finally to integration, then, the former three are seen as being outside the scope of a true partnership, while collaboration is viewed as a mechanism to achieve partnership.

Success

While the meaning of a *successful* partnership is assumed to be self-evident in many studies, in fact success can have multiple dimensions. In the context of our study, both *process* (what is achieved in terms of on-going relationships among partners) and *outcomes* (what is achieved in terms of sustainable tourism) are considered to be important.

With regard to determining or measuring the success of a partnership's processes, the Watershed Partnerships Project (2002, 14) suggests gauging success in terms of the effect of the partnership on human or social capital and on the “long-term policy implementation and conflict resolution” of the organisation (Leach and Pelkey, 2001). They note this approach as being particularly appropriate where the partnership has not been in place for very long or has had its progress thwarted by high levels of internal conflict. Leach and Pelkey (2001, 380) also include trust building, conflict resolution, satisfying the stakeholders, and strengthening the long-term organizational capacity of the partnership as process-related measures of success. Using these and other sources, the indicators that we included in our study as *measures of a successful process* were efficiency/productivity gains; social gains (e.g. equity and empowerment); stimulation of innovation; building social capital; strengthening organizational capacity and creating indirect benefits (e.g. local employment) (Laing et al. 2007, 63).

Partnership success can also be measured in terms of the results or outcomes of the partnership arrangement. However, distinguishing process from outcome can sometimes be problematic, for example, Bramwell and Lane (2000, 11) refer to “indirect benefits ... not directly related to the central environmental issue” as a category of success which could overlap *both* outcomes and processes. Mohr and Spekman (1994, 136) refer to outcomes in their “indicators” of partnership success and then proceed to divide them into “objective indicators” flowing from the process of goal-setting and “affective measures” (satisfaction with the partner), which occur “when partnership expectations have been reached.” In summary, there appears to be value in acknowledging that the two dimensions are not always discrete and distinguishable from each other.

Buckley and Sommer's (2001) series of case studies of tourism partnerships, while not explicitly defining the term “successful partnerships,” provides an insight into what can be

inferred to be success in the context of tourism-protected area partnerships, including such outcomes as:

- Conservation outcomes, e.g. reforestation, protection of wildlife, enhanced stewardship across local communities (Mburu and Birner, 2007), assistance with research and monitoring programs and protection of land from high-impact activities;
- Economic outcomes, e.g. providing funding for various conservation or restoration programs or protected area management, financial assistance for local communities and encouraging economic growth in regions without alternative sources of revenue;
- Social outcomes, e.g. public education or creation of local jobs; and
- Management outcomes, e.g. business skills development.

Following a similar approach, in our study we gauge the success of a partnership as one that achieves not only process outcomes as described above, but also sustainable tourism outcomes. In order to determine what these should be, it was important to review, critically evaluate and settle on a suitable definition and operationalization of sustainable tourism, as it is another term which is widely contested in the literature.

Sustainable tourism

As Sharpley (2000) observes, defining sustainable tourism is not a case of simply applying sustainable development principles in a tourism context; indeed, he goes even further, arguing that true sustainable tourism development is unattainable. In a somewhat different vein, Macbeth (1994, 42), notes the long-term nature of sustainable tourism and argues for its importance in setting a “moral agenda” and providing “a practical route map” for tourism. “Put simply, our task is to facilitate a tourism that will carry on, that will endure but that will also contribute, nourish and tolerate.” He identifies four principles within the sustainability model – ecological sustainability, economic sustainability, social sustainability and cultural sustainability. This model, applied in a tourism context, goes beyond a focus on maintaining steady numbers of tourists and involves a holistic approach or *quadrige*, to use Macbeth’s metaphor, with each “horse” (principle) required to pull the chariot (sustainability) evenly and in the same direction to optimize the outcomes.

Building on these principles, our search for an operational definition of sustainable tourism turned to UNEP and WTO (2005) and their twelve aims for an agenda for sustainable tourism. Using Macbeth’s (1994) categories, the twelve indicators include economic sustainability (economic viability, local prosperity, employment quality), social sustainability (social equity, visitor fulfilment, local control, community wellbeing), cultural sustainability (cultural richness) and ecological sustainability (physical integrity, biological diversity, resource efficiency and environmental purity). These twelve indicators are used as *measures of successful outcomes*.

In the context of our study, then, we are examining the success of particular partnerships with respect to both process and outcomes by using a series of indicators for each.

Success factors

In addition to gauging the success of a number of tourism-protected area partnerships, our study is aiming to identify the factors that contribute to or inhibit such success. To achieve such explanatory power and to avoid “reinventing the wheel”, we reviewed a wide range of literature, from which we determined that the areas of environmental dispute resolution (e.g. Bingham, 1986, Moore and Lee, 1989, Crowfoot and Wondolleck, 1990), social capital theory (Coleman, 1988, Macbeth, Carson and Northcote, 2004, Leach and Sabatier, 2005), institutional analysis and development (Ostrom, 1999, Imperial, 1999), adoption and diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1995, Lundblad, 2003, Braun, 2004) and network theory (Pavlovich, 2003, Saxena, 2005, Dredge, 2006a; 2006b) were particularly illuminating with respect to how particular factors might contribute to or explain partnership success. A very large number of factors were identified in this literature but these were then grouped into three broad categories: partner-

related, process-related and context-related. Moreover, a comparison across studies in different bodies of literature revealed that, in fact, a smaller number of key success factors could be identified as prevalent in partnership research in these other contexts. The factors which were picked up by most (five or more) theories are shown in Table 1. Between them, these five theories deal with all of the factors connected with partnership success. Determining which of these are influential in the success of tourism-protected area partnerships is a key aim of the study.

Table 1: Factors contributing to partnership success based on previous research

Category of Factors	Individual Factor
INDIVIDUAL PARTNER-related factors	Leadership
	Empathy Towards Partners
	Presence of Innovation / Openness to Change
	Distribution / Balance of Power
	Participation of Stakeholders
	Membership Composition
PARTNERING AND PROCESS -related factors	Scope of Partnership
	Shared Vision / Purpose
	Information Quality and Quantity
	Commitment
	Interdependence
	Trust
	Adequacy / Transparency of Process
	Structured Process
	Flexibility
	Open Internal Communication
	External Communication
	Dealing with Conflict
PARTNERSHIP CONTEXT -related factors	Adequacy of Resources
	Adequacy of Time / Duration of Partnership
	Legislative Framework
	Administrative Setting
	Enforcement of Behaviour / Decisions
	Benefits / Incentive

Source: Laing et al. (2007, 59) based on Bingham (1986)

Operationalization of constructs and study methods

This review of literature on success factors provides a rich basis upon which to develop measures that, together with indicators of process success and outcome success, might enable us to *explain* why some tourism-protected area partnerships are more successful than others. In our study, we are seeking to analyse in detail 22 individual partnerships, selected using a number of criteria in order to cover a very diverse set of partnerships. Some of the criteria used to select the partnerships include, for example, the age of the partnership, the number of partners, the types of partners (various levels of government, communities, non-government agencies), the level of formality of the partnership, the environmental context (marine vs terrestrial), the location, and so on. The remainder of this paper provides information about one of these partnerships: the Australian Alps National Parks (AANP), which was selected primarily because it is one of Australia's important partnerships involving trans-border partners. Its value to this paper is greatly enhanced by the longevity of the partnership and the widely held view,

including the view of the IUCN, that it is a highly successful partnership. Data collection via self-completed structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews is in progress, however, much of the history and achievements as well as the many challenges of this particular partnership can be gleaned from published sources. These include the work of the Australian Alps Liaison Committee (AALC) itself (including annual reports, regular newsletters, three-year strategic plans, and Education Kits) which are freely available via their website, the publication of the proceedings of the International Year of Mountains Conference held in the Alps in 2002 (Mackay and Associates 2003) which included several papers about the partnership, and Crabb (2003b)'s comprehensive review of the cooperative management of the AANP. This latter study included interviews with over forty people at all levels of involvement and covering all of the agencies in the partnership (Crabb 2003b, 84). Thus, the preliminary findings that are included here provide considerable insight into the degree of success of this partnership and the factors that have contributed to its success.

Background to the partnership: Australian tourism, protected areas and the Alpine National Parks

Much of Australia's nature-based tourism, ecotourism and adventure tourism activity occurs in protected areas such as national parks, conservation reserves, marine parks, and world heritage areas (Buckley and Sommer, 2001). As tourism in and around Australia's protected areas continues to grow at a steady pace (Buckley 2000, Cole 2001, Eagles 2002, Newsome et al. 2002, Worboys et al. 2001), protected areas are taking on even greater importance to the tourism industry.

In Australia, protected areas including national parks are managed at the state level. In the case of the Australian Alps National Parks (AANP), up until the mid 1980s, the various national parks located in the alpine region of south-east Australia, like other parks in Australia, were managed independently by the states of New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT, with some arm's length involvement by the Commonwealth government.

This part of Australia (see Figure 1) is home to some of the country's rarest animals including koalas and platypuses, as well as species found only in the Alps such as the mountain pygmy possum and the corroboree frog.

The Australian Alps are a treasure-trove of remarkable features ... the only marsupial to hibernate; a beautiful flowering species almost exterminated by grazing stock; a marsupial so rare it was discovered less than forty years ago ...; a bird about 30 cm long which flies from Japan to Australia in a few days to spend the summer in south-eastern Australia before flying back to Japan for the breeding season; and a cave in rock 400 million years old, superbly decorated with natural limestone formations.
Coyne, 2001: x.

The Australian Alps also serve to protect the headwaters of several major river systems and to conserve a rich and diverse Aboriginal and European cultural heritage. Population growth and demand for recreation and tourism in recent decades has increased the pressure to find ways to provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy these very special alpine areas while protecting these natural and cultural resources.



Figure 1: The Australian Alps National Parks

Source: AANP website

In 1986, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed by the three state governments and the Commonwealth government, encouraging these four jurisdictions to share responsibility for managing this linked and fragile ecosystem. Today the AANP includes seven national parks, one wilderness area and three nature reserves in three different states.

According to its strategic plan 2004-2007 (AALC 2004), the vision of the AANP is to work in partnership to achieve excellence in conservation management of its natural and cultural values and sustainable use through an active program of cross-border cooperation. Co-operative management of the AANP is guided in the first instance by the MOU, which was updated in 1996, 1998 and 2003 (largely to add additional parks and signatories), an AANP Co-operative Management Program, a strategic plan which is rewritten every three years, the Australian Alps Liaison Committee (AALC) consisting of one senior officer from each of the four government jurisdictions, and special task groups, some of which are ongoing (working groups such as the Working Group for Visitor Recreation and Facilities) and others of which are short-term (task forces). There is also an Alps Ministerial Council (which meets occasionally and is responsible for the MOU) and an Alps Head of Agencies Group (which meets annually and approves the strategic plan, advises the AALC on policy and priorities and negotiates for funding and in-kind support by the participating agencies) (Crabb, 2003a).

Indicators of the level of success of the AANP tourism-protected area partnership

As outlined earlier, indicators that any particular tourism-protected area partnership has been a success can include a number of *process outcomes* such as efficiency/productivity gains; strengthening organizational capacity; social gains (e.g. equity and empowerment); building social capital; stimulation of innovation; and creating indirect benefits (e.g. local employment). As foreshadowed earlier in this paper, there is overlap between some of these process outcomes and certain sustainable tourism outcomes. Analysis of existing reports reveals many indicators of success in these categories, as illustrated by the following examples.

Efficiency/productivity gains and strengthening organizational capacity

One major impetus for the creation of the original MOU was the need for more efficient and effective interstate law enforcement, and this has been an important outcome, with staff now trained and authorized to carry out law enforcement in adjacent border areas and rangers appointed as authorized officers for more than one agency (Crabb, 2003b).

The AALC has been very active in many other areas of organizational understanding and capacity-building. For example, with respect to Aboriginal heritage, a number of staff training activities and skill-building workshops have been run over a period of several years. The AALC was also instrumental in the development of an indigenous interpretive strategy for the Alps (Crabb, 2003b). Many non-tourism areas of resource management such as fire management, research into and reduction of feral animal and exotic pest species, water management, wilderness protection and, more recently, climate change management have all benefited from the considerable training and professional development activities of the AALC. It appears that the partnership has achieved more than what could have been achieved without its existence, both through fostering collaboration and through economies of scale and reduction of duplication.

Building social capital and stimulation of innovation

The AALC has been very active in training and awareness-building beyond the park agencies. With respect to tourism, much effort has been devoted to raising the awareness and knowledge of those working in the tourism industry, including the production of a tour operators' manual, delivery of training programs and workshops for commercial tourism operators, and the development and accreditation of a training module for tour guides focused on interpreting the AANP (Crabb, 2003b), although this latter initiative has yet to be fully implemented.

Another major contribution of the AALC has been to schools and teachers throughout Australia via its Australian Alps Education Kits. These are available on-line and are comprehensive and high-quality. There are several modules, for example, there is 17-page Kit entitled *Recreation and tourism in the Australian Alps* which covers the history of recreation and ski resort development in the Alps, horse riding, cycling, the Australian Alps walking track, the Australian Alps eight codes of conduct (Care for the Alps: leave no trace) program, the effects of recreation, and recreation planning, monitoring and management. The AALC also delivers teacher awareness workshops (Crabb, 2003b) and distributes CDs, brochures and other resources to teachers and others.

The Australian Alps long-distance walking track is itself an innovation that almost certainly could not have been achieved without the existence of the AANP. First suggested as early as the 1930s, major construction on the track did not begin until the 1970s. The establishment of the AANP together with funding from the Bicentennial Authority in 1988 facilitated the extension of the Alps walking track to include all three states. To walk the entire walking track takes several weeks, along which a walker ...

... climbs over the highest mountain in Australia as well as the highest peaks in the ACT, NSW and Victoria. It traverses country covered by snow for much of the year, descends to rivers that can become impassible when in flood, follows solitary roads, fire

access tracks ... and can be a pleasant stroll under clear blue skies or a battle to survive as the elements vent their fury upon innocuous travellers. (Siseman 2003, 337).

As such, the Australian Alps walking track has been described as linking understanding between bushwalkers from the different states by providing an opportunity for a high-quality interstate walking experience as well as through both on-site and off-site communication with visitors. For example, the AALC supports the Australian Alps walking track by maintaining a series of webpages under the AANP banner and providing prospective walking with track condition information, safety notes, trip planning notes, a track brochure, maps, track signage information, and minimal impact messages.

Finally, the three-day International Year of Mountains Conference held in 2002 was co-sponsored by the AALC. It included a *mountains for tourism* stream across the three days that featured several valuable papers on best practice tourism management in alpine areas by both Australian and overseas experts.

Creating indirect benefits

The existence of the AALC has generated only limited local employment, as much of the work of the AALC is undertaken by staff of the parks agencies who serve on the various committees. There is one secretariat position (a community projects officer) responsible for the marketing, public relations and media work of the AALC, including the website. There is also a program co-ordinator position which is filled on a secondment basis from within the existing park management agencies, and this person oversees the program and budget of the AALC and executes other aspects of the strategic plan.

In reviewing the various process outcomes that this partnership has achieved, it is the areas of relationship-building that are most in evidence – the development of a culture of cooperation among the participating agencies as well as those outside the actual partnership (AALC, 2004). There is enormous goodwill, understanding and trust, with one interviewee describing the partnership as “a brotherhood” and another as “a fantastic experience” (Crabb 2003b, 85). As Crabb (2003a, 40) expresses it, “[notwithstanding] very tangible achievements, perhaps of most value have been the intangibles, the day-to-day activities and on-ground work, networking, learning from others, peer support, things that are so hard to value in dollar terms but which are so valuable.”

Indicators that the AANP partnership has been successful in terms of *sustainable tourism outcomes* include economic, social, cultural, and ecological sustainability.

Economic sustainability (economic viability, local prosperity, employment quality)

It is difficult to attribute economic success solely to the existence of the AANP or the work of the AALC, however, it was the AALC who together with the STCRC funded a study assessing the economic value of tourism in the Australian Alps (Mules and Stoecki 2003). The research study involved a 12-month survey of a sample of visitors to the parks in all three states, resulting in a useable sample of nearly 5000 visitor-completed questionnaires. The study concluded that the capital value of the Alps for recreation, not including other use values, option values or existence values, is in the order of AUS\$40 billion. It also concluded that the expenditure of interstate visitors to the AANP contribute an annual gross state product of AUS\$322 million and the equivalent of 5,155 full-time jobs, described in the report as “jobs and income which would not occur in the absence of the parks” (Mules and Stoecki 2003,154).

The AALC has contributed to the economic sustainability of tourism in the Alps by playing a very active role in tourism marketing and promotion, including the funding of marketing strategies, contribution to tourism promotional displays, and the publication of a touring guide. A recent marketing plan includes activities targeted at two main audiences: rural neighbours and park visitors (AALC 2001, as cited by Crabb 2003b). Considerable AALC resources are committed to promoting the Alps through the community projects officer’s time producing

media releases and other marketing collateral, and through the funding of displays, newspaper inserts, and radio and television announcements. Finally, the AALC funds a very comprehensive and effective website which potentially reaches a global tourism audience.

Social sustainability (social equity, visitor fulfilment, local control, community wellbeing) and cultural sustainability (cultural richness)

The AALC runs frequent community awareness training courses, aimed at public contact staff but open to local residents. In 2001, the community awareness program received an award for excellence in the general tourism services category of the Canberra Region Tourism Awards (Crabb 2003b, 84) for its suite of marketing publications and products, including its website, community service announcements, workshop and efforts to develop links with the tourism industry. That said, there has been a continuing lack of community involvement as well as a lack of involvement by important non-park organizations such as the Victorian Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council and land managers outside the national parks (Crabb 2003, 41).

In spite of this lack of active participation in the AANP by the alpine resorts, the AALC has been very active in the development of uniform and coordinated tourism planning approaches, consistent messages and information, visitor advice, and visitor resources such as signage and interpretive materials that promote enjoyment, appreciation and sustainable use, to the benefit of both local residents and tourists (Crabb, 2003b and AALC, 2004).

The AALC's commitment to Aboriginal cultural heritage conservation and interpretation has already been mentioned. In addition to the significant gathering of Aboriginal people facilitated by the International Year of the Mountains celebrations in 2002, respect for the Aboriginal values and heritage of the Alps and improved engagement and involvement with Aboriginal people with connections to the Alps has been achieved via the Alps Co-operative Management Program (AALC, 2004). With respect to European heritage, the AALC sponsored inventory and survey work of the historic huts that are found throughout the Alps, the outcomes of which have been of relevance and benefit not only to the parks themselves but to a wide range of volunteer groups (Crabb, 2003b).

Ecological sustainability (physical integrity, biological diversity, resource efficiency and environmental purity)

There is little doubt that the AALC has been directly responsible for achieving improvements in the level of understanding and management of natural ecosystems, and some of this is evident in the considerable environmental research that has been on-going in the parks. The AALC maintains an Australian Alps Scientific Sites Database with plots that provide the means to monitor environmental change caused by fire, climate change, introduced plant species, and any number of land use practices such as cattle grazing and tourism resort operation. With regard to the latter, one important focus of the AALC has been on the implications of climate change, the increasing need for snow making for the ski resorts and the impact of increased demands for more water on the alpine ecosystems (Whetton 2002, cited in Crabb 2003b).

Topical work that has had potential ecological benefits on a much wider scale has occurred. For example, in March 2000 an international five-day human waste management workshop was held in the Alps, which dealt with contemporary approaches to human faecal waste management at visitor facilities, at trailheads and in backcountry protected areas AALC 2000, cited by Crabb 2003b).

At the level of the individual visitor, the AALC's main contribution has been the development of minimal impact codes of practice, largely through the development and distribution of visitor codes of conduct (Beckmann, 2003). With AALC funding and direction, a suite of minimal impact messages were developed, tested and then refined for a range of target audiences: independent visitors, special-interest recreation groups, teachers and educational leaders, students, local residents and commercial tour operators. These have been disseminated via a range of media including the mass media (newspapers), visitor information centres, schools, fliers, posters, signs, shelter displays, and accessories (e.g. water bottles), and incorporated into

the Alps walking track brochure and the AANP website (Beckmann 2003, 291), although the effectiveness of these in terms of influencing visitor behaviour is largely unknown.

On the other hand, some major cross-border issues have yet to be addressed, such as wild horses and dogs which can cause severe impacts on vegetation and pose significant threats to local wildlife and the integrity of the alpine environment. (Crabb 2003a, 41). Coyne (2001, 145-148) outlines a range of additional environmental threats to the Alps that are directly attributable to tourism and have not been addressed by the AANP, including:

- decreasing water quality (due to urban runoff from resort building, roads and car parks, and the disposal of sewage, which is discharged from treatment plants into streams)
- reduction of mountain pygmy-possum habitat (due to disturbance particularly during the ski season)
- impacts on terrestrial vegetation and the spread of weeds (due to resort development, snowmaking, bushwalking)
- increasing pollution (due to sewage generation and accidental spills)
- increase and spread of pest animals (due to road and resort development)

A number of additional recreation and tourism related issues were identified by Crabb's (2003b, 89) interviewees as areas where the partnership has so far failed to deliver cross-agency cooperation and consistency, including backcountry recreation use issues, horse-riding licenses, management of mountain-biking, and monitoring of visitor behaviour and impacts.

In summary, it appears that this particular partnership is credited with having achieved a considerable number of successes that extend well beyond the tourism elements that are the focus of this paper. Moreover, the AALC appears to be held responsible for relatively few failures with respect to both process and sustainable tourism outcomes. There is no doubt that the feeling of those who have written about the AANP perceive it to be an example of a very successful partnership.

Factors contributing to the success of the AANP tourism-protected area partnership

As illustrated in Table 1, factors that can contribute to the success of a partnership include individual partner-related factors, partnering and process-related factors, and partnership / context-related factors. To date, based on the perceptions of those who have written about the AANP, a number of the individual factors identified in Table 1 appear to have contributed to the success of the partnership. On the other hand, evidence of the presence or absence of several other factors is limited or entirely absent.

Partner-related factors that appear to have helped facilitate the success of the AANP partnership include:

- *Membership composition:* From Ministerial level through to field staff, there is involvement by staff from all of the partner agencies. At the initiation of the partnership, Crabb (2003a, 38) notes that "the right people came together at the right time, with a concern about the one place, the Australian Alps". A strength of the partnership today is that it operates at many levels, although its real strength is seen by many to be at the field staff level (Crabb, 2003b).
- *Participation by the relevant protected area management agencies:* This has been considerable such as at the level of the AALC and the working parties, but has also included a commitment by decision-makers (Heads of Agencies) to meet annually. Crabb (2003a, 40) notes that certain internal agendas such as the state of Victoria wanting to establish an alpine national park helped initially in getting the partnership off the ground.

- *Non-agency leadership and commitments:* Crabb (2003a) notes support from other organisations such as the Australian Conservation Foundation, particularly in the start-up phase of the partnership.
- *Empathy toward partners:* The frequent professional development and regular training activities provide opportunity, as mentioned earlier, for relationship-building, networking and peer support, at least by those directly involved in the partnership.
- *Leadership:* This has come from the agencies themselves, with some evidence of a sustained effort by particular individuals over many years, although there has been concern expressed by some (Crabb, 2003b) that this has not always carried through to implementation.
- *Distribution of power:* There appears to be a commitment to sharing the implementation role among the agencies by way of the rotational program co-ordinator position, but it is not known how well other aspects of the partnership such as decision-making are shared.

Some factors that do not appear to have been present include:

- *Membership by non-government agencies.* Links are lacking with tourism peak bodies and many key organisations and community groups including the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs, the Australian Conservation Foundation, National Parks Associations, and special interest groups such as horse riders and off-road vehicle groups (Crabb 2003b, 93). This appears to have hindered some aspects of the partnership.
- *Inclusion of all people affected by the partnership.* Some of the partners are very large PAM agencies and this may be an issue. Crabb (2003a, 40) notes a lack of commitment by some agency staff and a lack of recognition of its achievements. Several of Crabb's (2003b) interviewees commented on the fact that many agency staff do not see the work of the AANP and its working parties as core business.

Partnering and process-related factors that appear to have helped facilitate success of the AANP partnership include:

- *Scope of the partnership, shared vision:* These appear to be clear to all parties by way of the MOU, the three-year strategic plan, and the AANP Co-operative Management Program. There is evidence of a shared informal concern for the natural environment, a shared desire for uniform management policy and control, and a shared vision to do things better (Crabb 2003a, 38).
- *Information quality, quantity and transparency:* Documentation suggests that there are regular meetings and transparency about the activities and programs of the AANP partnership. What is less clear is how meetings are run, how decisions are made, and how well the outcomes of the various projects are disseminated and taken up.
- *External communication:* There is evidence of extensive external communication by the AANP with some stakeholders although, as noted above, there are many stakeholders with whom communication is inadequate or nonexistent.
- *Interdependence, commitment, trust:* As mentioned earlier, the perceptions of those who have written about the AANP are that there is a considerable degree of goodwill and a long-term commitment by those involved in the partnership.

There is no evidence from published sources of the following:

- *Dealing with conflict and change:* It is not clear how the AANP partnership deals with internal issues, nor how well it copes with change. Staff turnover was mentioned as an issue as was the tendency to focus on new projects rather than persisting with long-term tasks (Crab 2003b, 91).
- *Internal communication:* There appears to be a need for better communication about the AANP's activities and uptake of some of its findings on a broader scale within each

agency. Communication between the AALC and other levels of the partnership was also mentioned by Crabb's (2003b, 88) interviewees as an issue. Crabb (2003a, 40) notes that there is sometimes conflict with agencies' internal tasks that precludes implementation, which relates to the point made earlier about the work of the partnership not being seen as core business, and also reflects a lack of resources, a key issue we return to below.

Finally, *partnership / context-related factors* that appear to have helped facilitate success of the AANP partnership include:

- *Adequacy of time / duration of partnership*: The partnership has been in existence for over twenty years, and this has clearly contributed to the partners' sense of commitment and to its success. On the other hand, there are those (Crabb 2003b, 96) who describe the partnership as being "on a plateau", "at a low point", and even "declining".

There is evidence that the following issues may have hindered the success of the AANP partnership:

- *Legislative and administrative framework*: Despite the fact that all partners are state or Commonwealth government bodies responsible for protected areas and with similar mandates to facilitate tourism opportunities, Coyne (2001, ix) sees the differences in legislation across the parks as problematic, and Crabb (2003b, 88) identifies the Ministerial side of the MOU as needing attention. Coyne (2001, xiii) calls on the AALC in particular to strive for the resolution of differences in management objectives and standardisation of approaches and procedures to better facilitate environmental management.
- *Enforcement of decisions*: Crabb (2003a, 40) notes a lack of uptake and implementation of some of the decisions emanating from the partnership, making reference to the lack of legal and administrative authority of the AALC. The lack of resources for implementation and enforcement was raised by many of Crabb's (2003b) interviewees.
- *Adequacy of resources*: Inadequate staffing and lack of resources were the two issues most consistently mentioned in publications about the AANP partnership and by Crabb's (2003b) interviewees. The withdrawal of Commonwealth government funding in particular was seen as a significant threat to the partnership.

Results to date suggest that a wide range of partner-, process-, and context-related factors have contributed to the success of the partnership. If anything has inhibited its success, our analysis of published reports suggests that context factors such as disparate legislative and administrative frameworks, inadequate resources and the absence of legal authority on the part of the AALC have most constrained the partnership. However, these findings should be regarded as preliminary, as they may change once the interview and questionnaire data have been analysed.

Limitations, reflections, recommendations and conclusions

While indicators of success or at least perceptions of success can be gleaned from published sources, it has proven more difficult to identify the factors that contribute to or inhibit partnership success. It is thus important to undertake fieldwork, gaining access to individuals who have had considerable involvement in the partnership and can comment on its early stages as well as its current status. This is precisely what is planned for the remainder of this project, with in-depth interviews to be conducted with at least one representative of each partner in each tourism-protected area partnership.

In the case of the AALC, it has also been difficult to separate out the tourism element of the partnership, which has a focus and range of responsibilities well beyond tourism. In any case, putting boundaries around what constitutes tourism, let alone its impacts, can be problematic.

On a more positive note, the analysis of the present paper serves to illustrate the relevance of the theory, methods and findings of this study to existing trans-border partnerships and as a basis for recommendations for establishing, assisting and monitoring trans-border partnerships. The categories identified from the literature provide a rapid and apparently accurate means of identifying the influences on partnerships as well as the outcomes. The preliminary findings suggest the potential benefits that can be accrued from focusing further on elements of the context that may hinder partnerships, influences such as legislative and administrative incongruities and inadequate resourcing. The context can then, potentially, be actively managed to address these hindrances.

In conclusion, despite the plethora of studies which have looked at tourism partnerships in protected areas to date, partnerships remain “an evolving concept and practice” (Brinkerhoff 2002, 28). This study leverages off of existing theory from fields such as environmental dispute resolution, social capital and network theory to identify a series of partner-, process- and context-related elements and examine the extent to which each of these contributes to or inhibits the success of tourism-protected area partnerships. The present paper focuses on findings from the Australian Alps trans-border partnership which suggest that this partnership has been on the whole a very successful one. The findings also provide insight into how to make effective use of a partnership to achieve outcomes such as the strengthening of agency efficiency, the building of organizational, community and tourism industry capacity, the enhancement of social capital and goodwill, and the stimulation of innovation.

This case study provides evidence that even a modestly-funded partnership can deliver economic, social, cultural, and ecological sustainability outcomes, although it suggests that greater resourcing would enhance these outcomes. Certainly it suggests that the partnership has made a real contribution to managing tourism sustainably in a multi-jurisdictional protected area context.

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